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The Greatest Connection: Unfolding Our Unique Potential Through Partnership Between All

By Maria Paz

Why do we question ourselves so much about what we can achieve? How is it so hard to believe in what we can create, as individual human beings but also as a whole, as humanity? I am 'only' 33 years old and I have had the chance to live certain experiences and meet other humans that have showed me that if we believe in oneself and in others then we are actually fulfilling life's purpose, which for me is to actually be here, live fully and believe in oneself and others. What has led me to this reflection? Discovering in my deepest self what some would call a concept but I will refer to as a feeling: that each and everyone of us has a **unique potential**; that if societal conditions let us fulfil this potential then humanity, 'we', will connect in a deeper way which will lead to a fairer world. In this article we will explore the profound connection that exists between each and everyone's **unique potential** and the **shift of paradigm and mindset that ACT2gether is promoting and wants to expand** all over the world. We will look at the purpose of ACT2gether, building partnership between generations for a fairer and sustainable world, as an essential piece in the puzzle to understand and fulfil our unique potential. We will explore this from the four perspectives proposed by the L4WB approach to understand how we need our head, heart, hand and spirit aligned in order to fulfil this purpose. We will discover how ACT2gether is implementing this approach in order to participate in a worldwide social movement and what the challenges of these are. I invite readers to explore and be aware that this could change our lives a little bit or a lot, and change the world in the most positive and courageous way, through believing in the greatest connection with everything and with all.

1. Introduction: How I personally connect to ‘unique potential’

I started writing this article with a lot of questions. I had the privilege to write about something I believe in, but I thought at first: what a difficult task! One of my first questions was how do I talk about unique potential (‘the vital energy and qualities that provide meaning, purpose and direction to an individual’s life’) without making it too personal? I felt blocked in trying to write; then, by talking about it one day in the office something clicked: why not make it personal? In fact, I believe that talking about purpose in life and each and everyone’s unique potential is as personal as it can get. This viewpoint reflects my personal understanding, thoughts and feelings towards the fulfilment of our unique potential throughout life. Let me first tell you a bit about my story and then present how I believe it is linked to the values, purpose and work of ACT2gether.

I grew up in a small neighbourhood in La Paz, Bolivia, surrounded by mountains and the love of a very big family. I don’t think I realized how lucky I was until I discovered, as an adult, that whenever someone talked about activities for developing our unique potential, I could somehow understand deep in myself what it meant. Little by little, I feel I am discovering, living and unfolding my unique potential, but how did I come to that? I haven’t been able to fully answer that question yet. I know it is connected with feeling loved, being protected, feeling recognized and being offered different possibilities to grow on an intellectual and spiritual level.



A few years ago, I started working in the children’s rights field, more specifically in the area of child participation. It felt like a call to me; everything within me felt aligned. I enjoyed it so much that I felt the need to understand how my engagement with this cause emerged. I attended different workshops, retreats, and meetings, finally finding my answer in a very simple and powerful meditation exercise of connecting to your inner child. During the exercise you remember how it was to be a child, and what feelings were the most significant. I remembered and realized that as a child, I felt considered, heard and loved. Those conditions completely changed my life and allowed me to find clear purpose as an adult. Having recognized those conditions, how do I – and how do WE – share this with others?

2. How I describe 'unique potential'

Learning for Well-being uses a working definition of well-being as 'realizing one's unique potential through physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual development in relation to self, others, and the environment'. This emphasizes that allowing the expression of our undivided and evolving self (unique potential) is at the heart of well-being.¹

It is difficult to use words to explain something about which I feel so deeply. For me, unique potential has everything to do with spirituality, in the largest sense of this word. Finding the way to unfold one's unique potential is an ongoing spiritual experience. In reading remarks from a presentation by Guy Claxton, a British educator, I connected to his simple definition of a spiritual experience as a 'common experience.' Claxton refers to these experiences as more common (in frequency) than we think and also suggests that there are four qualities that spiritual experiences seem to have in common. He describes them as follows: 'an unusually strong sense of aliveness ... frequently characterised by a heightened sense of energy and vitality – an unusual clarity or strength of perception.' The second quality is 'belonging: a sense of being at home, at ease in the world, that seems to be independent of actual places and situations.' The third quality he calls 'an affinity with mystery, involving a curious, almost paradoxical sense that all is well with the world, despite not knowing how things are going to turn out.' 'Fourth, there is a sense of enhanced peace of mind, a quietness of mind, heart, body and spirit.'²

There is a sense of wholeness as we consider these common elements of a spiritual experience, one that I can relate easily to my own early environment and experiences of feeling safe, loved, recognized for my own gifts, and inspired to grow. When you have a sense of meaning and purpose in your own life, you can feel anchored where you are, free to explore and be yourself, and live fully in presence through all of your life. It is the deepest connection that you can have with everything, knowing that you are part of a whole that is larger than yourself, and connected to the known, the unknown, and the unknowable. The beauty of this connection is that it allows us, in our differences, to share our common experiences of peace, mystery, belonging and aliveness, and through these to help ourselves and others to allow the expression of our unique potential.

What a privileged situation to be in where you can feel you are unfolding your unique potential, but what happens to children living in difficult situations, where many of their rights are not being respected? I believe that through these common experiences, spirituality is available in any setting. Finding a way to connect to your unique potential can be expressed in many different ways, such as resilience after a violent experience leading you to find the fire in you to fight injustice because you live it. It is a duty for all of us, who are conscious of this, to find ways to support others in their path and to fight with them for the respect of everyone's rights. That is where I find my 'fire'.

¹ <https://www.learningforwellbeing.org/our-approach/>

² www.guyclaxton.net Mind Expanding: Scientific and Spiritual Foundations for the Schools We Need, University of Bristol lecture, October 21, 2002.

So, if we can talk about these experiences as being common how can we set up conditions so that everyone can discover their unique potential? How do we allow the expression of our unique potential for ourselves but also so that we can help others, and from each us, contribute to the development of humanity?

3. We are discovering together as we create ACT2gether

When ACT2gether started we were a large group of individuals, volunteering to be a part of this initiative that we hope will grow into a social movement. Many of us had worked together, closely or less closely, during some of the six years of CATS;³ others were new to the group. From the beginning, we established that the concept/feeling of every person's unique potential would be at the centre of our values, purpose and actions. I think natural selection drew together people who could connect their own personal purpose to the shared group purpose. The L4WB approach supports the centrality of individual and collective purpose and meaning and proposes four perspectives – head, heart, hand and spirit – to align ourselves in wholeness to everything we live and do, and encourages the use of our core capacities. Through this context, we managed to create a safe space in which we could show vulnerability but also share our dreams without feeling judged and while being appreciated as whole humans. What connects us deeply is the belief that developing partnership between generations can actually create positive impact in the world. This shared belief, connected to us personally, gave us a collective purpose – a sense of aliveness which I experience personally but also feel within the group. I think that is what drives us today.



Within Act2gether, we are committed, as a principle, to nurturing behaviours that provide purpose, meaning and direction in every activity that we propose. In order to do this, we have set up some conditions: one condition is being attentive to whether there is a clear purpose for the process in which participants and especially children are asked to engage, and to check, in a variety of ways, whether this purpose is meaningful to individual members of the group. Another condition is to promote and create opportunities where children can develop the capacity to sense, feel, and experience what brings meaning and

³ CATS (Children As Actors for Transforming Society), in partnership with Initiatives of Change France and the Caux Foundation.

purpose to their lives, and how that connects with their context and life. Still another condition is to invite everyone to notice what is unique about each person, and how such uniqueness is expressed as qualities in the way a child or an adult engages with the experience. We need all of us to participate in identifying these qualities in order to create spaces and contexts in which these qualities can be used and expanded.

I can genuinely say that in the many years I have participated in conferences, events, and workshops in the children's rights field I never fully experienced a spiritual connection to what I was doing or related it to my own purpose and that of the group. That began to happen for me first in the CATS programme and continued even more strongly in Act2gether. I believe the main difference is that the experiences feel more whole. I believe the focus on connecting the spiritual, mental, physical and emotional perspectives is what is unique to what we are doing. Running a workshop or a dialogue group needs to take into account that the individuals and the group are living whole systems, and the experiences created need to relate to that wholeness of feeling, reflecting, acting and connecting to all the people. It becomes an actual living experience of wholeness in which you can find individual and collective purpose. Initially, it can sound difficult or complicated but, in my experience, just the fact of being aware of what is possible and trying your best to make every moment alive and relevant is a big part of it.

In ACT2gether we believe that nurturing safe and respectful relationships between generations, children and adults, can be developed and grow into a wider social movement with an impact on how we tackle societal challenges. Let's see how we implement this.

4. Planned activities to promote purpose/meaning in the centre of every endeavour

In Act2gether we aim to promote opportunities where everyone can express their uniqueness and recognize each other as competent partners.

To do this, we offer innovative and creative gatherings to allow a shift in mindset so that both adults and children can see each other more fully and learn to work together while feeling safe in being themselves, and still be connected to one another. This might sound simple or extremely complex. As a team, it took us many years and learning from several mistakes in order to create tools, imagine different ways of thinking, challenge paradigms and build skills that will allow us to contribute to the creation of spaces where everyone feels they can contribute and learn together.

An innovative approach to fulfil children's rights in a holistic way? What a challenge some may say! The strength of our approach for the fulfilment of children's rights comes from the acknowledgment that each one of us is unique. When we do this, rights become much more human and can be understood as conditions that we as humans need in order to feel safe, considered and respected. For a long time, we have approached respected children's rights primarily as implementing the Convention of the Rights of the Child effectively all over the world at national and local levels. As we celebrate the 30th anniversary of the

Convention this year, we recognize that it represented a real revolution in thinking about children and their intrinsic rights. Yet the challenges are still enormous; advancing towards more effectiveness in the actual fulfilment of these rights for all feels very difficult. One of the bigger challenges comes from not seeing this Convention (and the laws and rules it has inspired) as a part of everyday life, so that they become a part of being human, not separate from ourselves.

I believe this is what Act2gether brings to the ongoing discussion about rights and how we implement them: an innovative approach that focuses on how we propose to live them, through a partnership between generations, respecting and connecting with one another.

5. How intergenerational learning opportunities allow fuller expression of individual/group unique potential

One of the main actions of ACT2gether is promoting learning journeys, of different lengths, in different settings. The core of these is the possibility to choose and connect to one's way of learning, expressing and processing information. We are constantly developing new alternatives and resources for different environments where children and adults collaborate not only in schools and families but also in municipal governments where it has been shown that these kinds of initiatives give better results to the public policies that are implemented. We believe that part of unfolding one's unique potential throughout life is constant and mutual learning. A main goal in this is to be able to promote the existence of a pool of children and adults, within a system capable of development and renewal, that is ready to help others in creating the conditions needed for children and adults to collaborate and contribute. In that sense we also aim to support experiences that already exist on intergenerational learning, such as adolescents in schools delivering workshops for younger children or children sharing training experiences with municipal authorities in order for them to better understand their reality when it comes to designing public policies.

Finding purpose in life, understanding it through the concept of wholeness, is deeply related to finding and developing the inner and outer expression of our unique potential. These learning opportunities aim to be experiences where we can all participate, express our uniqueness, embrace diversity and co-create.



6. Creating a worldwide community of mutual learning with unique potential at the centre: facing the challenges

I want to conclude by considering the question of how we can grow into a worldwide community and somehow maintain the magic of what we have clearly said is ‘the indescribable.’ This is the greatest challenge. There is extraordinary potential in finding more effective ways for partnership between generations, and one of our main goals with Act2gether is to promote innovative virtual spaces where we can connect and be part of a wider global movement. We believe that if there is a mind shift for people from different ages and sectors, who are connected globally and who feel and live these connections, first with themselves, and then with one another, we can have an enormous social impact.

We also know that this cannot happen without a substantial shift in how we view ourselves and one another.

I know in my deepest self that each and every one of us has a unique potential. The sooner we live that recognition fully, and advocate for societal conditions that let us fulfil this potential then humanity (that is, us) can connect in ever deeper ways. This will lead us to be able to construct a fairer world. I have not provided a clear definition of what it means to fulfil one’s unique potential – finding purpose and meaning in life is an ongoing process that I believe never ends. My desire has been to express how I try to feel and live every day with the awareness of the sacredness of each and every life. I believe that we are all part of the whole, and that the connections that we can have with one another, and what we give from our deepest self to others, is and can be the energy that allows us to constantly and throughout life express our unique potential. Believing in everyone’s unique potential is one of the most courageous acts, since it is focusing on the positive and believing in what we can achieve as individuals and as humanity. Let’s be courageous – keep believing in ourselves and one another, and from different parts of the world participate in creating the inner and outer conditions so that we can all find purpose in life: me, you and all of us as humans.

7. Author



Maria Paz is a Bolivian woman who has been passionate about children’s rights and child participation from a very young age. She studied in the French School in La Paz, Bolivia and

moved to Paris in 2004 to study International Law and International Cooperation. Her voluntary work in different NGO's led her to specialise in the Education and Children's Rights sector. She has worked for 'Initiatives of Change France' as the field coordinator of the 'Education for Peace Programme' in Paris for the last 5 years. She is now living in La Paz, Bolivia, where she is developing child participation projects and doing field research.

8. Dedication

There are people that have influenced me in different ways or have opened doors in order for me to feel free, safe and better know myself in order to discover and experience my unique potential. One of these amazing humans is Jean Gordon and I will be forever grateful for her kind attention, presence and inspiration, because with her existence and example she has contributed to light more and more my 'fire'.